

August 1962

THE COMMUNIST MOVEMENT IN INDIA

I. Introduction

The Communist Party of India is the second largest political party in the country. Its claimed strength at the time of the last party Congress, April 1961, was 177, 501, a drop of some twenty per cent from a 1959-60 peak. It received roughly ten per cent of the popular vote in the general elections of both 1957 and 1962, and at present it leads the Opposition in the State Assemblies of Andhra, Kerala, and West Bengal as well as that in the Lok Sabha (lower house of the national parliament). Though legal and a significant factor in Indian politics, the Communist Party of India is not known to have placed any of its members in high governmental positions aside from legislative bodies.

Small, independent Marxist parties supplement Communist Party work in several of the Indian states, especially in West Bengal, where five of them formed a united front with the Communist Party in the 1962 elections, to add twenty-three legislators to the Communist Party's fifty. More important on an all-India basis, however, has been Communist Party cooperation with individual members of the amorphous left wing of the ruling Congress Party. The most notable example of this during the 1962 elections was the open Communist support given the candidacy of Defense Minister V. K. Krishna

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Menon. Examples of this cooperation are also found in front organizations such as the All-India Peace Council, the Indian Association for Afro-Asian Solidarity, and Indo-Soviet Cultural Society, where Congress Party members and legislative representatives occupy leading positions and cooperate with Communists in the pursuit of common foreign policy objectives, even though the Congress party discourages its officials and government officers from participating in Front activities.

Within their front organizations having a mass character, i.e., those dealing with workers, peasants, women, and youth on the other hand, the Communists do not share power with the Congressmen or members of any other major political party. The most important of these mass organizations is the All-India Trade Union Congress, which with a membership estimated at between 500,000 and 1,000,000 appears to be India's most effective trade union federation.

II. The Communist Party of India (CPI) apparatus

A. Though the CPI's claimed membership in April 1961 was 177,501, current estimates by non-party sources place the figure as low as 150,000. This does not appear to be as serious from the Party's standpoint as one might first think, for it maintained its 1957 electoral strength in the 1962 elections, and at least part of the membership decline is thought to be due to planned

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infiltrating the ruling Congress Party. Roughly half of the CPI strength is concentrated in the three southern (Dravidian) states of Kerala, Andhra, and Madras; and the second largest concentration of party membership (about ten per cent) is in West Bengal, another non-Hindi-speaking area.

B. Character

In spite of its size the CPI is basically a cadre type party. Its major leaders as well as its headquarters bureaucracy appear to be both articulate and intelligent. At this top level a roughly even balance appears to have been struck between mass organization leaders on the one hand and "intellectuals" on the other. About half of the members of the Party's Central Executive Committee are university graduates, and several of these attended European universities. Below this level the quality of party leadership tends to deteriorate, but the situation here is no worse than in any other large Indian political party. Ideological differences and a lack of Party discipline have made the CPI more democratic but less unified than most Communist Parties.

C. Structure

The last National Congress of the CPI consisting of 460 delegates met in April 1961, and elected an 110 member

National Council which in turn elected a thirty member Central Executive Committee. In April 1962 the Central Executive elected a nine-member Secretariat. The Party also has a covert Defense Organization, set up to conduct subversive activities within the armed forces but it is apparently inactive at present.

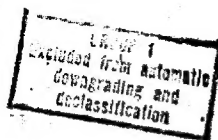
D. Factionalism

The left wing of the Party, led by Executive Committeeman B. T. Ranadive, is strongly opposed to the Congress Party and its government, tends toward the use of mass organizations to engage in violence, and follows the lead of the Chinese Communists rather than the Soviet Union in international questions.

This group controls about one-third of the Party's leading organs, the National Council, Central Executive, and Secretariat, as well as the state organizations of Madras, West Bengal, and the Punjab.

The center and right wing factions generally follow the lead of the Soviet Union in foreign affairs and are less critical of the Nehru government. The left center group, led by Party Secretary General E. M. S. Namboodiripad and controlling the Kerala state organization, has some reservations concerning current Soviet diplomacy toward India and attempts to cooperate with certain members of the Congress Party left to force the government to impose on India a Soviet style socialist

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economy. The right center group, led by S. A. Dange, long the Party's trade union leader, controls the Maharashtra (Bombay) state organization. It is less friendly to the Congress than either the left center or right wing Communists. It sees many progressive Congressmen as rivals for leadership in the trade union field with which it is especially concerned, and, probably, as increasingly dangerous and powerful opponents as government influence over the Indian economy increases. It has been the most outspoken of any Communist faction in opposing the actions of the Chinese Communists on the India border. Taken together the two center factions control roughly half the Secretariat and a little under one-third of both the Central Executive and National Council.

The right wing faction, led by P. C. Joshi, secretary general of the Party from 1935 to 1948 and now an Executive Committee member, is the least critical of any Communist faction toward the Congress Party and the Nehru government. This group's concern with the exploitation of national liberation themes (Goa, Kashmir, etc.) is intended in part to help the left wing increase its influence in the Congress Party and ties in with other efforts by the group to weaken India's ties with the free world and promote its support of Soviet international policy. Nevertheless its members have been

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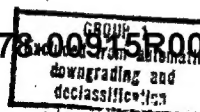
India less vociferous in their criticisms of Communist China's *aggression against* than those of the right center group. ~~national liberation~~ being ~~a major theme of Chinese (as opposed to Soviet)~~ propaganda. The right wing controls the state party organization in Orissa, has one member on the Central Secretariat, controls one-third of the Central Executive and a little more than one-third of the National Council.

III. Principal propaganda media

The Party's official English-language weekly, New Age, with an estimated 1961 circulation of 45,000 appears to be the largest of any one of its publications. The national Party publishes another English-language periodical in New Delhi, New Age monthly, a theoretical journal with an estimated circulation of some 5,000. Concurrent with their assumption of the two highest party offices in early 1962, Chairman Dange replaced B. T. Ranadive as editor of New Age monthly and Secretary General Namboodiripad replaced P. C. Joshi as editor of New Age weekly, a victory of the center over both extremes. Between them, provincial units of the Party publish in virtually every major Indian language. The more outstanding of these provincial publications are in Kerala.* Deshabhimani (Malayalam daily, circ. 34,000)

*Kerala has the highest literacy rate of any of the Indian states.

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and Janayugom (Malayalam daily and weekly, circ. 26,000), and Navakeralam (Malayalam daily, circ. 14,500), in Andhra: Visalandhra (Telugu daily, circ. 18,500), and in Madras: Janasakthi (Tamil daily, circ. 16,000), the three Indian states with the greatest Communist Party membership. The official publication of the fourth-ranking Communist Party of West Bengal, Swadhinata (Bengali daily, circ. 11,000) is important because it carries the extreme leftist line, often in direct conflict with the central party organ, New Age weekly.

At the other, right wing Communist, extreme are two non-party publications that bear mentioning, Blitz and Link. Both follow the line common to the left wing of the Congress Party and right wing of the Communist Party. Blitz is a sensational weekly tabloid published in Bombay while Link is a high quality political weekly magazine published in New Delhi. Link's staff contains ex(?) Communists who among other things give excellent coverage of supposedly closed meetings of top Communist organs. It is

thought that right wing Communist leaders feed material to Link to harass and discredit the other Party factions and to gain so that their relatively popular policies might receive publicity. (that the avowed Party journals will not or cannot give them)

IV. Party assets in government

The Party's assets in government are primarily legislative. The 1962 elections to the lower house of parliament gave the Communists

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30 representatives (out of a total of 507) with 11,473,384 votes (10%) plus three supporting Independents. Subsequent (indirect) elections to the upper house gave the Communists 14 representatives (out of 236) plus 3 supporting Independents. In elections for state legislative assemblies during the 1960-62 period, the Communist Party received a total of 12,207,190 votes electing some 202 state legislators. As mentioned before, the Communists lead the Opposition in the Lok Sabha as well as in the state assemblies of Andhra, West Bengal, and Kerala, where they have 51, 50, and 30 members respectively. The chief agents of Communist influence in the administration of the national government are members of the left wing of the Congress Party who have goals in foreign policy, and to a lesser extent in domestic policy, similar to those of the right wing Communists. The most outstanding member of this group is V. K. Krishna Menon, defense minister and de facto deputy foreign minister, elected to parliament in 1962 with strong Communist support. Communist and Communist front personalities have also recently joined the Congress in order to strengthen, as they say, the progressive elements therein. The leading example here is Dr. A. V. Baliga, president of the Indo-Soviet Cultural Society, who joined the Congress in order to manage the 1962

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electoral campaign of V. K. Krishna Menon. Menon, together with Minister of Mines and Fuel K. D. Malaviya, the second most important leftist in the Cabinet, have been responsible for strengthening India's ties with the Soviet Union and Eastern European nations in both the political and economic spheres. In this effort they are aided by a host of Menon's proteges in the Foreign Office.

Diwan Chaman Lal, Congress MP (upper house) has organized the Indian Parliamentarians for Peace as an adjunct to the Communist-front All-India Peace Council, and over 200 Congress MP's of both houses openly supported the Moscow World Peace Congress of July 1962. Over the past two years, moreover, left wing Congress cooperation with the Communist Party has been notable in the states of Andhra, Kerala, Maharashtra, Orissa, Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal.

V. Front organizations

Communist front organizations in India fall into two categories, white-collar organizations engaged in propaganda designed to appeal to the widest possible audience, and mass organizations engaged in propaganda and agitation designed to benefit a specific occupational or interest group. Perhaps the most important of the white-collar groups is

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the All-India Peace Council, an affiliate of the World Peace Council. This organization, composed of Communists, left-Congressmen and Independents, has suffered from internal dissensions recently because of the Sino-Indian border dispute and the Soviet resumption of nuclear testing. Other such organizations are the Indian Association for Afro-Asian Solidarity, an affiliate of the Afro-Asian People's Solidarity Organization, and the allied Indian Writers Association for Afro-Asian Solidarity. These two organizations are outgrowths of the Peace Movement, and Communist influence and leadership of them is less apparent. Their propaganda functions chiefly in the field of national liberation. Communist bloc friendship societies also serve as white-collar fronts. They are supported by the bloc embassies concerned and serve primarily to create favorable publicity on their behalf. The Indo-Soviet Cultural Society, the largest and most important of these, is thriving; but needless to say the India-China Friendship Association, formerly second only to the Soviet society in size, has been practically moribund since the outbreak of hostilities on the northern border. All of these organizations are small as far as actual membership goes, but they are capable of organizing and coordinating widespread popular support in certain specific issues.

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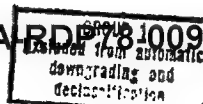
In contrast to the intellectuals' fronts, the Communists in the mass organizations do not share power with the left wing of the Congress, or with any other group; in fact in most of these fields, and particularly in the trade unions, the Congress has its own, rival parallel organization. The All-India Trade Union Congress, an affiliate of the World Federation of Trade Unions, is the most important of these. It has a claimed membership of 1,047,815 and a government-verified one of 508,962 (the true figure appears to lie somewhere in between the two). Though smaller by one third than the Congress Party's Indian National Trade Union Congress, the Communist union appears to be more effective and better led. The All-India Kisan Sabha (Peasants Association), an affiliate of the World Federation of Trade Unions' Trade Union International of Agricultural and Forestry Workers, has a claimed strength of nearly 800,000 and an actual (estimated) one of about 500,000. Though this organization has no serious rival in India, it has failed to mobilize more than a small fraction of the Indian peasantry; herein lies the Communist Party's greatest organizational failure. The All-India Youth Federation, with a claimed strength of over 150,000, is an affiliate of the World Federation

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of Democratic Youth. The All-India Students Federation, with a strength of about 20,000, is an affiliate of the International Union of Students. Like the Kisan Sabha the Students Federation has been rent with factional discord. This has involved the separatist tendencies of the left-wing-Communist West Bengal group, which desires to have the organization function as a true mass organization. They oppose the right-wing-Communist-dominated central leadership which desires to keep the organization small and to use it primarily for a recruiting ground for Communist Party cadre. The National Federation of Indian Women, an affiliate of the Women's International Democratic Federation, appears to be small and not particularly active.

Two other front organizations fitting in neither of the above categories are professional groups affiliated with international fronts and engaged in support activity for CPI-directed agitational and propaganda campaigns. These are the All-India Association of Democratic Lawyers, an affiliate of the International Association of Democratic Lawyers, and the Association of Scientific Workers of India, an affiliate of the World Federation of Scientific Workers.

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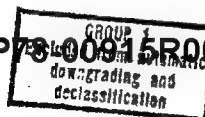
The leaders of these organizations, as well as those of all the fronts mentioned in this section, attend international conferences of their parent bodies where they receive the current world Communist line for their respective groups.

VI. Bloc contacts

Communist bloc embassies in New Delhi maintain contact with the CPI. M. A. Suslov led a Soviet delegation to the CPI's April 1961 Congress and was credited with helping to bring about the degree of Party unity that was achieved at that meeting. Indian Communists travel frequently to the Soviet bloc and attend the Congresses of other Communist Parties both inside and outside of the Communist world. The late CPI secretary general, Ajoy Ghosh, led a seven-man Indian delegation to the twenty-second Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in October 1961 and spent much of that year resident in Moscow.

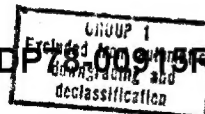
VII. Other parties of the far left

Four Marxist parties operate a trade union front called the United Trade Union Congress with a claimed membership of 210,109 and a government verified one of 110,034. The dominant party here is the Revolutionary Socialist Party which cooperates with the Communist Party in both Bengal and Kerala, in which two states

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it elected 8 state legislators (with a total of 317,284 votes) as well as 2 members of parliament. The next most important party in this group is the Revolutionary Communist Party of India, a Trotskyite group which received a total of 90,768 votes in electing a total of 3 members to the Assam and West Bengal Legislative Assemblies. The third group here is the Socialist Unity Center, a radical, pro-Chinese Communist party which polled 53,441 votes in the elections for the West Bengal Legislative Assembly; and the last is the Bolshevik Party of India which polled 11,449 votes for the same body. Taken together, these four parties occupy a position to the left of the Communist Party of India, a situation ^{that led to the withdrawal} ~~resulting in the departure~~ of the most radical, the Socialist Unity Center, from the Communist Party dominated united front in West Bengal in mid 1961. Another party that left this united front, in early 1962, was the Marxist Forward Bloc, which had elected 1 member to the West Bengal Legislative Assembly and received 20,486 votes in those elections. The much larger Forward Bloc, which elected 2 members of parliament and 16 state legislators (the latter with a total vote of 614,347) in West Bengal and Madras, continued its cooperation with the Communists in the West Bengal united front.

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Two other parties are important in the state of Maharashtra. The Peasants and Workers Party is in the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti, a political coalition to which the Communist Party also adheres. The Peasants and Workers Party received 818,617 votes electing 15 members to the Maharashtra Legislative Assembly and also elected 1 member to parliament. One faction of the Republican Party, the Bhandari group, also participates in the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti. It is not known what percentage of the Republican Party's 1,412,442 votes which elected 10 or more state legislators or its 4 members of parliament are members of this faction. This party is strong in Uttar Pradesh and Andhra as well as Maharashtra.

VIII. Current policies

~~The Communist Party's official policy statements are invariably~~
~~excompromised. The views of the center faction tend to be most~~
~~prominent in such policy statements because they are abetted~~
India has long been given special attention by the international Communist movement, and since 1951 CPSU policy toward India has become very complicated. As a result, the policy problems of the Communist Party of India are probably more complex than

those of any other free world party. The Communist Party's current policy is designed to achieve two ends. First, it seeks to increase its own membership, mass following, and representation within legislative bodies at the state and national level. Second, it seeks to exert pressure on the central government, by endorsing many of its foreign policies as well as some of its domestic goals, while criticizing and discrediting many of the administrators and the specific measures that are involved in the government's attempt to achieve them. Many disputes within the party concern the proper balance to be maintained between these endorsements and agitational pressures on the government and the dominant Congress Party. Two general lines of criticism were adopted in the Political Resolution of the April 1961 CP Congress. (a) it implied that in spite of his past performance, Nehru was no longer fit to lead the "progressive" elements within the Congress because of his "vacillation". (periodic concessions to rightist pressure). It called for the Communists to provide leadership for progressive Congress elements not only in the trade union and peasant fields but also in cooperative programs on such basic national issues as the communal rights involved in disputes between linguistic, cultural, and religious groups. (b) It charged that the Congress Party government was surrendering to rightist pressure, giving too much encouragement to the growth

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of the private sector of the economy and allowing the influx of Western capital. It demanded new efforts to expand the public sector and restrict private capital, and called for more and better use of Soviet bloc economic aid and trade. It also called for increased mass actions by all groups (workers, peasants, etc.) to force the government to adopt these policies.

As mentioned in Section III sections of the Communist Party tended to follow different lines of action in different states during the 1962 electoral campaign, depending on the comparative influence of other political forces in the state. In general, it can be stated that they supported individual "progressive" Congress candidates as well as Independents of the same ilk. On the other hand the Communists often go to almost any length, even to the point of cooperating with some of the local communal parties to which they were theoretically most violently opposed, in order to defeat conservative and anti-Communist Congress Party and Socialist candidates.

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